

CHAPTER 28

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS 28

In this chapter an account is given of the charge Isaac gave to Jacob not to marry a Canaanitess, but to go to Padanaram, and take a wife from his mother's family, and of his blessing him before he sent him away, (^{<0281>}Genesis 28:1-5); of the notice that Esau took of this blessing and charge, which led him to take a wife of the family of Ishmael, (^{<0286>}Genesis 28:6-9); of the dream of the ladder, which Jacob had in his way to Haran, (^{<0280>}Genesis 28:10-12); of the blessing which God conferred upon him there, (^{<0283>}Genesis 28:13-15); of the awfulness of the place upon his awaking, and of his erecting a pillar in it, and giving a name to it, (^{<0286>}Genesis 28:16-19); and of the vow he made to God, should he be supplied with the necessaries of life, and be kept in safety by him, (^{<0280>}Genesis 28:20-22).

Ver. 1. *And Isaac called Jacob*, etc.] Or therefore ^{f1443}, because of what Rebekah had said to him, related in the latter part of the preceding chapter, he sent for Jacob to come to him from his tent or apartment where he was, or from the field where he was keeping the flocks; thus paying a great regard to what his wife Rebekah had suggested to him, and which appeared to him very right and reasonable:

and blessed him; he did not send for him to chide and reprove him for his fraudulent dealings with him to get the blessing from his brother, much less to revoke it, but to confirm it; which was necessary to prevent doubts that might arise in the mind of Jacob about it, and to strengthen him against the temptations of Satan; since he was about to be sent away from his father's house solitary and destitute, to go into another country, where he was to be for awhile in a state of servitude; all which might seem to contradict the blessing and promises he had received, and would be a trial of his faith in them, as well as a chastisement on him for the fraudulent manner in which he obtained them:

and charged him, and said unto him, thou shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; it was time that he was married; for he was now, as

the Jewish writers ^{f1444} say, seventy seven, years of age, which exactly agrees with what Polyhistor ^{f1445}, an Heathen writer, relates from Demetrius, that Jacob was seventy seven years of age when he came to Haran, and also his father Isaac was then one hundred and thirty seven years old; and so it is calculated by the best chronologers, and as he must be, since he was born when his father was sixty years of age, (see Gill on ^{<-0270>}Genesis 27:1”); and being now declared the heir of the promised land, it was proper he should marry, but not with any of the Canaanites, who were to be dispossessed of the land of Canaan, and therefore their seed, and Abraham’s, to whom it was given, must not be mixed. Isaac takes the same care, and gives the same charge concerning the marriage of his son Jacob, on whom the entail of the land was settled, as his father Abraham did concerning his, (^{<-0243>}Genesis 24:3).

Ver. 2. *Arise, go to Padanaram*, etc.] Of this place, (see Gill on ^{<-0253>}Genesis 25:20”); either he is bid to go directly, in haste and alone; perhaps by this time Rebekah had given Isaac some hint of the ill design of Esau against him, which made Isaac the more urgent upon him to be gone, as well as it was high time he had took to himself a wife:

to the house of Bethuel thy mother’s father; who though now dead in all probability, yet the house and family went by his name:

and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother’s brother: who had daughters unmarried, of which no doubt Isaac and Rebekah had knowledge, a correspondence being kept up between the two families, though at a great distance.

Ver. 3. *And God Almighty bless thee*, etc.] This is not a new blessing, distinct from that in (^{<-0231>}Genesis 28:1), but the same; there it is expressed in general, here the particulars of it are given; and by which it appears, that Isaac’s blessing Jacob was a prayer, wishing a blessing from God upon him, and was the prayer of faith, delivered out under the spirit of prophecy; and they are blessed indeed that are blessed of God, and they must needs be blessed who are blessed by the Almighty; for what is it he cannot do or give? The Targum of Jonathan adds,

“with much riches;”

but no doubt all kind of blessings are included, both temporal and spiritual:

and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee; with a numerous offspring:

that thou mayest be a multitude of people; or an “assembly” or “congregation” ^{f1446} of them; which may all unite in one body and make one nation, as the twelve tribes descending from Jacob did.

Ver. 4. *And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee*, etc.] Which was promised to Abraham, and was entailed upon Isaac and his seed, and now upon Jacob and his seed, which follows:

that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave to Abraham; the land of Canaan, which was given to Abraham by promise, but not in possession; he was a sojourner and stranger in it, and so Isaac had been all his days, and now Jacob, who through the blessing was become heir of it; but as yet neither he nor his posterity must enjoy it, but be strangers and sojourners in it, for the exercise of faith, and for the leading of their minds off of all earthly enjoyments, to the better and heavenly country God has provided for his people; (see ^{<310>}Hebrews 11:9,10,13,16).

Ver. 5. *And Isaac sent away Jacob*, etc.] From Beersheba; not in anger, or in a dishonourable way, but took his leave of him no doubt in an affectionate manner; as it is clear he went with his blessing, and had his good wishes for a prosperous journey:

and he went to Padanaram; which from Beersheba, according to some ^{f1447}, was four hundred and eighty miles:

unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian; some versions make Laban to be the Syrian, others Bethuel; it is a matter of no great moment which is here so called, since they were both called Syrians, (see ^{<0250>}Genesis 25:20):

the brother of Rebekah; this refers to Laban, for Bethuel was her father:

Jacob's and Esau's mother; Jacob is set first, not only as being most beloved by his mother, but as now having the birthright and the blessing.

Ver. 6. *And when Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob*, etc.] Had conferred the blessing before given, or had wished him a good journey; which perhaps may be all that Esau understood by it, and so was not so much offended with it:

and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; which likewise might not be displeasing to him, partly as he understood it to be only on account of taking a wife, and not on account of his ill design upon

him, which he might imagine his parents knew nothing of; and partly as he would now be out of the way, and he might find means the easier to ingratiate himself into his father's favour, and get him to revoke the blessing, and settle the inheritance upon him:

and that as he blessed him, he gave him a charge, saying, thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; or of the Canaanites, of any of the tribes or nations that belonged to that people, whether Hittites or others.

Ver. 7. *And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother,* etc.] As it became him, and as it becomes all children to be obedient to their parents in all things lawful they command them; and it would have been well if Esau had been obedient to them also in a like case, the case of his marriage:

and was gone to Padanaram; as they had enjoined him, to take a wife from thence.

Ver. 8. *And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father.*] Who he perceived was displeas'd with the daughters of Canaan, or that they were "evil in [his] eyes"^{f1448}, offensive to him, and disapproved of by him, because of their ill manners: Rebekah is not mentioned, whose displeasure he cared not for.

Ver. 9. *Then went Esau unto Ishmael,* etc.] Not to Ishmael in person, for he was now dead, (⁴⁰²⁵⁷Genesis 25:17), and had been dead as is reckon'd about fourteen years before this, but to the house of Ishmael:

and took unto the wives which he had; the daughters of Heth, and who seem by this to be both alive at this time:

Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son; the same with Bashemath, (⁴⁰³¹⁸Genesis 36:3); as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it, this person having two names, and is further described,

the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife; who was the eldest son of Ishmael, and, his father being dead, was the principal in the family; and this woman Esau took to wife was his sister by his mother's side, as the above Targum expresses, as well as by his father's; whereas he might have other sisters only by his father's side, he having had more wives than one. This Esau seems to have done in order to curry favour with his father, who was displeas'd with his other wives, and therefore takes one of his father's

brother's daughters; but in this he acted an unwise part, on more accounts than one; partly as it was taking to wife the daughter of one that was cast out of his grandfather's house, and had been a persecutor of his father, and therefore not likely to be agreeable to him; and partly as being a daughter of the bondmaid's son: children born of her could not inherit the land promised to Abraham and Isaac.

Ver. 10. *And Jacob went out from Beersheba*, etc.] Where Isaac and Rebekah now lived: from hence he went alone, without any servants to attend him, though perhaps not without letters of recommendation from his parents, testifying their affection to him, and that he came with their knowledge and consent, and was their heir, as Isaac had been to Abraham; nor without provisions, at least not without money to purchase them by the way, as appears by the oil he had, (⁰²⁸⁸Genesis 28:18):

and went toward Haran: for thither he could not get in one day, being many days' journey; (see Gill on "⁰²⁸⁵Genesis 28:5").

Ver. 11. *And he lighted upon a certain place*, etc.] Without any design to take up there, but as it were casually to him, though very providentially, after he had travelled forty eight miles; for so far it seems it was from Beersheba to Luz or Bethel ^{f1449}, as this place was called:

and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; which hindered his pursuing his journey any further that day, and therefore took a night's lodging here: and he took of the stones of that place; one of the stones that lay there, as Aben Ezra and Ben Melech rightly interpret it, as appears from (⁰²⁸³Genesis 28:13); though the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem will have it, that these were four stones that he took, and that by a miracle they became one, and is one of the five miracles they say were done for Jacob on that day:

and put [them for] his pillows, and lay down in that place and slept; being weary with his journey though he had no other bed than the earth, and for his pillow a stone, and for his canopy or curtain the open heaven; a different lodging this from what he had been used to in his father's house, and under the indulgence of his mother; and one would wonder how he could sleep in such circumstances, and that he did not take cold, after such a journey: but it must be considered that it was in a warm climate, and in an age when they did not use themselves to such soft beds as now, and especially that he was under the particular care of divine Providence.

Ver. 12. *And he dreamed*, etc.] As he slept; not a common dream, but under divine direction and influence:

and, behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: denoting either the providence of God, and the various steps of it, bringing about his own glory and the good of his people; and which is steady, firm, and sure, and reaches to all things here on earth; and in an especial manner is concerned about the people of God, their protection and safety; and is directed and governed according to the will, counsels, and purposes of God in heaven; a view of which must be very encouraging to Jacob in his present circumstances: or else the incarnation and mediation of Christ, who in his human nature was to be in the fulness of time on earth, there to live a while, obey, suffer, and die, and so was the ladder set on earth; and his divine nature was the top of it, which reached heaven; here he was in that nature before his incarnation, and from hence he came; and indeed here he was in that when on earth; and as man, he ascended on high when he had done his work, and is now higher than the heavens; he may be fitly represented hereby as the Mediator, who has reconciled things in heaven and things on earth, and has as it were joined and united heaven and earth together: and the various rungs in this ladder, so considered, are Christ's interposition as a surety front eternity; his incarnation in time; his being under the law, and his obedience to it; his sufferings, the shedding of his blood, and the death of the cross; his resurrection from the dead, ascension to heaven, session at the right hand of God, and intercession there. Moreover this may point out to us Christ as the way to his Father, of access unto him, and acceptance with him, by which he communicates the blessings of his grace to men, and by which they ascend to God with their prayers and praises to him: as also as being the way to heaven and eternal happiness; the various steps to which are election in him, redemption by him, regeneration by his Spirit and grace, the several graces of his Spirit, faith, hope, and love, justification by his righteousness, pardon by his blood, adoption through him, and the resurrection of the dead:

and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it: which may be expressive of the employment of angels in the affairs of Providence, who receive their commission from heaven, and execute it on earth, in which they are diligent, faithful, and constant; and of the ministry of them, both to Christ personal, and to his church and people, even to every particular believer; (see ^{<RUS>}John 1:51).

Ver. 13. *And behold, the Lord stood above it*, etc.] Ordering, directing, and overruling all things in Providence, for the glory of his name and the good of his people; and may signify, as the ladder may be a figure of Christ, that Jehovah the Father, is above him, as man and Mediator, and makes himself known in and by him, and delivers out all his blessings and promises through him, both temporal and spiritual, and such as follow:

and said, I [am] the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: their covenant God and Father in Christ, who had made promises unto them, and bestowed blessings upon them; and the same was and would continue to be the God of Jacob, which is strongly intimated:

the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; meaning not that small pittance of land only on which his body then lay, and which it covered, but all the land of which it was a part, even the whole land of Canaan; hereby entailing it on him and his seed, and so explaining and confirming the blessing of his father Isaac; and by which it appears, that all that had been done was under a divine direction, and according to the will of God.

Ver. 14. *And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth*, etc.] Innumerable, (see ^{<0136>}Genesis 13:16 ^{<0230>}Numbers 23:10);

and thou shalt spread abroad to the west; or “the sea”, the Mediterranean sea, which was west of the land of Canaan:

and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; not of the whole world, but of the land of Canaan: the meaning is, that his posterity should be numerous, and break out and spread themselves like a flood of water, and reach to the utmost bounds of the land on all sides:

and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed; that is, in that eminent and principal seed that should spring from him, the Messiah, in whom some of all nations should, as they have been, be blessed with all spiritual blessings, as redemption, peace, pardon, justification, adoption, and eternal life; the same promise had been made to Abraham, was renewed to Isaac, and now confirmed to Jacob, (see ^{<0228>}Genesis 22:18 26:4).

Ver. 15. *And, behold, I [am] with thee*, etc.] Though alone, at a distance from his father’s house, no friend to keep him company, or servant to

attend him; but the presence of God here promised is abundantly more than an equivalent for all this:

and will keep thee in all [places], whither thou goest; from beasts of prey, in lonesome places through which he might travel; from thieves and robbers, to whom he might be exposed; from his brother Esau, and all his ill designs against him; and from being always under the bondage of Laban, into which he would be brought:

and will bring thee again into this land: the land of Canaan, which was entailed on him and his seed for an inheritance; but, as he would now soon be out of it, and continue in another land for many years, as he did, which would make it look very unpromising that he and his seed should inherit it, this is said unto him:

for I will not leave thee, until I have done [that] which I have spoken to thee of; made good all his promises to him: and the sense is, not that he would then leave him when he had done so, but as not before, so never after; for God never does, nor never will, utterly forsake his people.

Ver. 16. *And Jacob awaked out of his sleep*, etc.] Which had been sweet unto him, and out of his dream, it being now over; and it having left such a weight upon his mind, and such an awe upon his spirits, it might tend the sooner to awaken him; what time it was is not said, perhaps it was in the middle of the night or towards morning, since after this it is said that he rose early in the morning:

and he said, surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew [it] not; God is everywhere, in a general way, upholding all things by his power, as he is immense and omnipresent; but here he was in a special sense, by some signal token of his presence; by a stream of light and glory darting from the heavens, hence Onkelos and Jonathan paraphrase it,

“the glory of the Lord, and the glory of the majesty of the Lord;”

and by the appearance of angels, and by the communications of his mind and will, and grace to Jacob, and that communion he had with him in his dream, of which he was very sensible: for, when he says, “I knew it not”, the meaning is, he did not think or expect to meet with God in such a place; he did not know that God ever appeared anywhere but in the houses of his people, such as his father’s house; and in the congregation of the faithful, or where the saints met for public worship, or where an altar was

erected for God: though sometimes God is present with his people, and they are not sensible of it; as the church in (²³¹¹⁰Isaiah 41:10); and as Mary, when Christ was at her elbow, and she knew him not, (⁴³⁰³John 20:13).

Ver. 17. *And he was afraid*, etc.] Not with a servile but filial fear; not with a fear of the wrath and displeasure of God, but with a fear of his grace and goodness; not with a fear of distrust of it, of which he had just had such a comfortable assurance; but with an awe of the greatness and glory of God, being conscious of his own unworthiness to receive such favours from him;

and said, how dreadful [is] this place! not terrible and horrible, being not like Mount Sinai, but like Zion; not as the suburbs of hell, but as the gate of heaven majestic and venerable, because of the glory of God that appeared in it, whose name is holy and reverend and because of the holy angels here present: and so the church, of which this was an emblem, is a solemn assembly, awful and venerable; a city of solemnities, because of the worship of God in it, and his presence there; who is to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about him; and where persons should behave in a serious and solemn manner. The Targum of Jonathan is,

“how tremendous and praiseworthy is this place! this is not a common place:”

this [is] none other but the house of God; wherefore he afterwards called it Bethel, which signifies the house of God; and so the church of God is often called, (⁴²¹⁶Psalm 23:6 69:9 ⁵⁴⁸⁵1 Timothy 3:15 ⁴⁰⁴⁷1 Peter 4:17); which is of God’s building, where he dwells, and his family is, of which he is the master and governor; which he beautifies and adorns, fills, repairs, and defends:

and this [is] the gate of heaven: Mr. Mede renders it “the court of heaven”, because of the angels; since in gates justice was administered by kings, attended with their retinue; but royal courts were not kept there, only courts of judicature: this place seems to be so called, because the heavens were opened and the glory of God was seen, attended by his angels, who were passing and repassing, as people through the streets of a city; and was an emblem of the church of Christ, who is figured by the ladder set on earth, whose top reached to heaven, the door, the gate, the way of ascent to it; here he is preached in the word as the way of salvation, the way to heaven and eternal happiness; here he is held forth in the

ordinances; here he grants his presence to his people, and indulges them with communion with him, which makes it like and next to heaven unto them: and, generally speaking, though not always, God brings his people to heaven this way, through a Gospel church state, and by means of the word and ordinances; and here angels also attend, (^{<B110>}1 Corinthians 11:10).

Ver. 18. *And Jacob rose up early in the morning*, etc.] In order to proceed on his journey, being comfortably refreshed both in body and mind: but first he

took the stone that he had put [for] his pillows, and set it up [for] a pillar; not for a statue or an idol to be worshipped, but for a memorial of the mercy and goodness of God unto him, (see ^{<004B>}Joshua 4:3-9); indeed, among the Heathens, stones, even rude and unpolished ones, were worshipped as gods; and this was the ancient custom among the Greeks, and which, as Pausanias ^{f1450} says, universally obtained among them:

and poured oil upon the top of it; which he had brought with him for necessary uses in his journey, or fetched from the neighbouring city; the former is most likely: and this he did, that he might know it again when he returned, as Aben Ezra remarks, and not for the consecration of it for religious use; though it is thought, by some learned men ^{f1451}, that the Phoenicians worshipped this stone which Jacob anointed; and that from this anointed stone at Bethel came the Boetylia, which were anointed stones consecrated to Saturn and Jupiter, and others, and were worshipped as gods; the original of which Sanchoniatho ^{f1452} ascribes to Uranus, who, he says, devised the Boetylia, forming animated stones, which Bochart renders anointed stones; and so Apuleius ^{f1453}, Minutius Felix ^{f1454}, Arnobius ^{f1455}, and others, speak of anointed stones, worshipped as deities; and hence it may be through the early and ancient abuse of such pillars it was, that they were forbidden by the law of Moses, and such as the Heathens had erected were to be pulled down, (^{<030E>}Leviticus 26:1 ^{<030E>}Deuteronomy 7:5 12:3).

Ver. 19. *And he called the name of that place Bethel*, etc.] The house of God, which he took this place to be:

but the name of that city [was called] Luz at the first; which signifies an almond or hazel nut, (^{<03B7>}Genesis 30:37); perhaps from the number of this sort of trees that grew there, under which Jacob might lay himself down, which was probably in the field of Luz; and being at night, he might not

know there was a city so near, until the morning. Though Josephus^{f1456} says he did it purposely, out of hatred to the Canaanites, and chose rather to lie under the open air. This was about twelve miles from Jerusalem, as Jerom^{f1457} says.

Ver. 20. *And Jacob vowed a vow*, etc.] Which is the first vow we read of in Scripture:

saying, if God will be with me; the word *if* is not a sign of doubting, but is either an adverb of time, and may be rendered, “when God shall be with me”^{f1458}; or as a supposition, expressive of an inference or conclusion drawn, “seeing God will be with me”^{f1459}; which he had the utmost reason to believe he would, since he had not only promised it, but had so lately granted him his presence in a very singular and remarkable manner, referring to the promise of God, (^{<02815>}Genesis 28:15):

and will keep me in this way that I go; as he had said he would, and as hitherto he had, and for the future he had reason to believe he still would:

and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on; which is included in that clause, “I will not leave thee”, etc. (^{<02815>}Genesis 28:15), even not without food and raiment; which is all men can desire or use, and therefore with them should be content.

Ver. 21. *So that I come again to my father’s house in peace*, etc.] In safety from Esau, and all other enemies, as God promised him he should:

then the Lord shall be my God; not as if he should not be his God if he did not do all this for him; which would savour not only of a mercenary spirit, but of great impiety; neither of which were to be found in Jacob: but the meaning is, that he should not only continue to own him as his God, and to worship him, but having fresh obligations upon him, should be stirred up more eagerly and devoutly to serve him in a very singular way and manner, and particularly by doing what is expressed in (^{<02822>}Genesis 28:22). Some think he has respect to the Messiah, owning him to be the true God with the Father and the blessed Spirit, who had appeared to Abraham, and was the fear of Isaac, and whom Jacob now owned as his God: this receives some confirmation from the Targum of Jonathan, which begins the paragraph thus,

“if the Word of the Lord will be my help, etc. then the Lord shall be my God.”

Ver. 22. *And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house,* etc.] Building an altar of it with some others, and sacrificing to God on it; and wherever God is worshipped, that place is his house, be it what or where it will; and Jacob did as he promised to do, (see ~~GEN~~ Genesis 35:3,7):

and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee; for the support of his worship; for the maintenance of such that were employed in it; for the provision of sacrifice, and for the relief of the poor, or for any use or service in which God might be glorified: this was imitated by the Heathens in later times, who gave the tenth of their substance to their gods, Jupiter, Hercules, and others^{f1460}.